

98

BIOGRAPHY OF
ROBERT F. WAGNER
FORMER MAYOR OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Mr. Wagner is the first Democrat ever to win three successive terms in City Hall. The only other Mayor elected to serve 12 years was Fiorello LaGuardia.

Bob Wagner was practically born into practical politics and progressive, liberal government. He was the only son of the late Senator Robert F. Wagner and the late Margaret McTague. He was born in Yorkville, New York on April 20, 1910, at a time when his father was launching himself on a career which led to national fame as a practical liberal.

He attended public elementary schools in Yorkville, then Loyola School, Taft School and Yale University, class of 1933. Then came the Harvard School of Business Administration, the School of International Relations at Geneva for a summer, and Yale Law School, from which he was graduated in 1937.

He was nominated by the Democrats for the State Assembly from the Yorkville District in 1937, was elected and re-elected until he resigned from the Legislature early in 1942, as the first member of it to enter the armed forces. He served for the duration in the Air Force, emerging as a Lieutenant Colonel, with the Bronze Star, Presidential Unit Citation, Croix de Guerre and six battle stars.

He returned briefly to private life as a member of his father's old law firm -- Wagner, Quillinan and Tennant -- but was quickly drafted back for public service, first as a member of the Tax Commission, then Commissioner of Housing and Buildings, and finally as Chairman of the City Planning Commission.

His major league career in politics began when he was elected Borough President of Manhattan in November, 1949, with the support of the Democratic and Liberal Parties, a post he held until he was elected Mayor in 1953. As Borough President, Wagner split with the then Mayor, Vincent Impellitteri, over vital issues, such as subway fares, education, home rule and rent control, opposed Mr. Impellitteri successfully in the Democratic primary, and easily defeated Harold Riegelman and the late Rudolph Halley in the general election.

He suffered political defeat only once, when he ran for United States Senator in 1956, and even then, he established a record by running more than a million votes ahead of the ticket, which was headed by Adlai E. Stevenson.

He has been both Vice President and President of the United States Conference of Mayors, and has been President of the American Municipal Association. He holds honorary degrees from Long Island University, Fordham, and Brooklyn Law School.

Mr. Wagner's mother died when he was nine, but in accordance with her wishes, he was brought up as a Catholic. His father converted to Catholicism several years before his death in 1953. In the period between the end of World War II, in 1945, and his father's retirement from the Senate in 1949, Mr. Wagner served unofficially but actively as his father's aide in pending matters of national legislation.

He married Susan Edwards of Greenwich, Connecticut, sister of his Yale classmate, on St. Valentine's Day, 1942, while he was in the Air Force. Their first son, Robert F. Wagner, III, was born January 6, 1944, and was a year and a half old before his father saw him. The second son, Duncan Edwards Wagner, was born November 30, 1947.

Mrs. Susan Wagner died on March 2, 1964.

Mayor Wagner married Barbara Cavanagh on July 26, 1965. They now reside at 1 Gracie Terrace in New York City. The Wagners have a summer estate in Sands Pt., Long Island. The Wagner hobbies are golf and small-boating.

On June 10, 1965, Mayor Wagner announced that he would not be a candidate for re-election as Mayor. His term ended December 31, 1965.

In January 1966, Mr. Wagner resumed the practice of law and returned to the firm of Wagner, Quillinan and Tennant as a Partner. His office is located in the Empire State Building, 350 Fifth Avenue, New York City.